Followship: A 2008 White Paper

By Marc Hurwitz, PhD Candidate

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Executive Summary

In building better organizations, employees require the skills to participate fully as leaders, team members, and followers. While there is extensive research on leadership and team-based behavior there has been little discussion of followship. Indeed, even identifying someone as a follower is often associated with a highly negative connotation. Why? What are we missing by ignoring followship? Can we build better organizations by improving the quality of followship?

The goals of this white paper are as follows:

1. Review and summarize the research on followship from both academic and practitioner sources.

2. Define followship.

3. Investigate whether followship is relevant to organizational effectiveness and/or personal career success.

4. Propose a new model for followship that incorporates the latest research.

As we shall see, there is convergent evidence that good followers enjoy greater personal and career success, and are more effective in their jobs. Followship is a role not a personality type and it should be framed in terms of role expectations and behaviors. Once an appropriate definition is in place, I lay out a model of followship distinct from leadership or team-based behaviors. For example, being a good communicator is clearly important for leaders, team members, and followers; it is not a behavior unique to any one role. However, there are differences between effective upwards communications and leadership communications; these are separate skills. Current theories of followship, leadership, and team-membership ignore this distinction.

The model I propose is based on two new core competencies: Leader Support™, and Personal Manageability™. The model adds significant new insights into the role: followship is not only distinct from other organizational roles, but *good followship* is vital to organizational and personal success. Furthermore, good followship can be taught, the same as any other behavior-based skill.

Theories of Followship[1][2]

The *Great Man Theory* of history first proposed by Thomas Carlyle in the 19th century asserted that history could be written as the biographies of great men. If Rome rose it was because of Julius and Augustus Caesar and therefore the study of these two great men contained all the important kernels of truth about Roman hegemony. The reality, however, is far more complex. Many factors led to the rise of Rome, the most obvious being the invention of concrete with its many uses in the ancient world including architecture, military fortifications, roads, and urban infrastructure.

Historians no longer obsess over great men, but there is still a *romance of the leader* (Meindl, 1995; Bligh & Schyns, 2007) with its belief that *heroic leadership* (Baker, 2007; Dixon & Westbrook, 2003) is a major determinant of organizational success[3]. In fact, it appears that attributing more responsibility, both good and bad, to leaders is an inherent trait we all share. Consider, for example, how many of the myths, legends and stories from various cultures emphasize individual acts of leadership (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). Perhaps this explains the overabundance of management books and articles on leadership, and the very few on followship – a search conducted in a major academic database, PsychInfo, on the keyword *leadership* uncovered over 12500 peer-reviewed articles and 1000 books. A search of Google™ turned up over 143 million hits. A similar search on *followership* revealed only 43 peer-reviewed articles and 7 books on PsychInfo, with 135000 hits on Google™ for about 1/1000th as many references. Baker (2007) has conducted an extensive review of followship searching 28 academic databases and still turned up only 480 references to followship.

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[1] The more common term is followership. I use *followship* for two reasons. First, one purpose of the white paper is to begin to rebrand the concept and semantics help. Second, it's easier to say 'followship'. Nevertheless, the two terms mean the same thing and can be used interchangeably. Most academic and practitioners currently use followership.

[2] Heller & Van Til (1982) created an excellent set of Propositions about followship in the early 1980's. Unfortunately, no-one has taken their research position seriously and tested which of the 18 propositions are valid. Because I think the list is so good, I've taken the liberty of reproducing it in Appendix A.

[3] Meindl introduces the idea of the romance of the leader to test whether people generally have a tendency to use "The Great Man Theory" in an organizational context. Meindl's research shows that people over-attribute causes to the impact of the leader, especially when the outcomes of an action are either very positive or very negative. Most of the authors quoted in this White Paper share the same perspective: leadership is idealized with insufficient regard to the contribution and importance of followship.

Looking through those references, less than 10% actually pertain to followship as a distinct, important role. Most treat followship only as the outcome of a leader's actions.

Of course, the study of followship does exist and it is more extensive than the above statistics suggest but appears in fragments rather than as a unified construct. Followship is often the hidden underlying theoretical construct[4] or antecedent of the behavior being measured: theories such as *upwards impression management*[5] and *upwards influence* (Farmer & Maslyn, 1999; Harris, Kacmar, & Carlson, 2006; Yukl, Fu, & McDonald, 2003), *organizational citizenship behaviors*[6] (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Paine, 1999), *social capital theory* (Thompson, 2006), or *leader-member exchange* (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Gerstner & Day, 1997) contain elements of the followship role or are the observable outcomes of followship.

The title of an article by Thody (2000), *Followership or Followersheep? An Exploration of the Values of Non-Leaders*, says a lot about prevailing attitudes towards followship. There is a fear that followship is not much more than bleating *Yes* to the commands of a shepherd or perhaps allowing oneself to be herded; if someone admits to being a follower then perhaps they are also admitting to being less interested in their career, in their future development, in mastering their environment, or in personal effectiveness. Maintaining this negative stereotype of followship is damaging because it inhibits rational discussion of followship and it also impedes individual and organizational development of followship skills. Some writers on

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[4] For example, upwards impression management is clearly an aspect of the overall construct of followship.

[5] There will be some academic lingo in this paper. Where it is important, I'll add footnotes to explain the terms in plain language. I hope my explanations give the flavor of the meaning but I'd also caution that they aren't always technically precise. If you want more detail and greater precision, look up any College-level general textbook on Organizational Psychology.

[6] MacKenzie (1999) describes OCBs as three categories: Civic Virtue, Sportsmanship, and Helping.
The category "Civic virtue" contains followship items such as:
- Attends functions that are not required but that help the agency/company image
- Actively participates in agency/company meetings.

The category "Sportsmanship" contains followship items such as:
- Consumes a lot of time complaining about trivial matters
- Always focuses on what's wrong with his her situation rather than the positive side
- Tends to make "mountains out of molehills"

The category "Helping" contains followship items such as
- Encourages other managers in the office to do well in their jobs
- Is a stabilizing influence in the agency when dissent occurs
- Is willing to take time out of his or her busy schedule to help with recruiting or training new agents

followship believe that the only way to counteract the yes-man attitude towards followship is its antithesis: learning to say *no* by standing up to leadership (Chaleff, 1995). While there is value in looking at courageous followship this, too, is an oversimplification.

As we will see, being a *good* follower is far more than agreeing with the boss and more, too, than disagreeing with the boss. Good followship requires a variety of skills that enhance the leader-follower interaction and the work of the organization. Most people are both followers and leaders – being a follower is a *role* not a type of person, just as being a leader is a role not a type of person. People are both followers and leaders throughout the working day.

The following is an overview of the research on followship, what it is, what value it has, and whether it is worth developing in employees.

The evidence that there is personal and career value in being a good follower

In a meta-analysis[7] of predictors of objective and subjective career success, Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman (2005) found that while no single factor dominated, objective career success had a preferential relationship to human capital[8] and sociodemographic factors[9] while subjective career success (as measured by career satisfaction) was related to organizational sponsorship[10] and other individual traits which could reasonably be interpreted as followship. Similarly, Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, & Graf (1999) studied 245 supervisor-subordinate dyads[11] and concluded that contest-mobility[12] was a poorer predictor of career success than sponsored-mobility[13]. Because sponsored-mobility is clearly related to followship, this study implies a preferential role for followship in career success.

A number of authors have found a link between upwards influence tactics and promotability (Thacker & Wayne, 1995; Knipis & Schmidt, 1988; Farmer & Maslyn, 1999) and

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[7] A meta-analysis is an analysis of the work of multiple authors by combining all their data together. More data gives you more power to detect what's actually going on, while still controlling for the chance of falsely thinking something is going on.

[8] Human capital is the skills, abilities, training, experience, and other similar attributes that an employee brings to their job.

[9] This is a broad category that includes personal background such as social status, race, gender, parental education, etc.

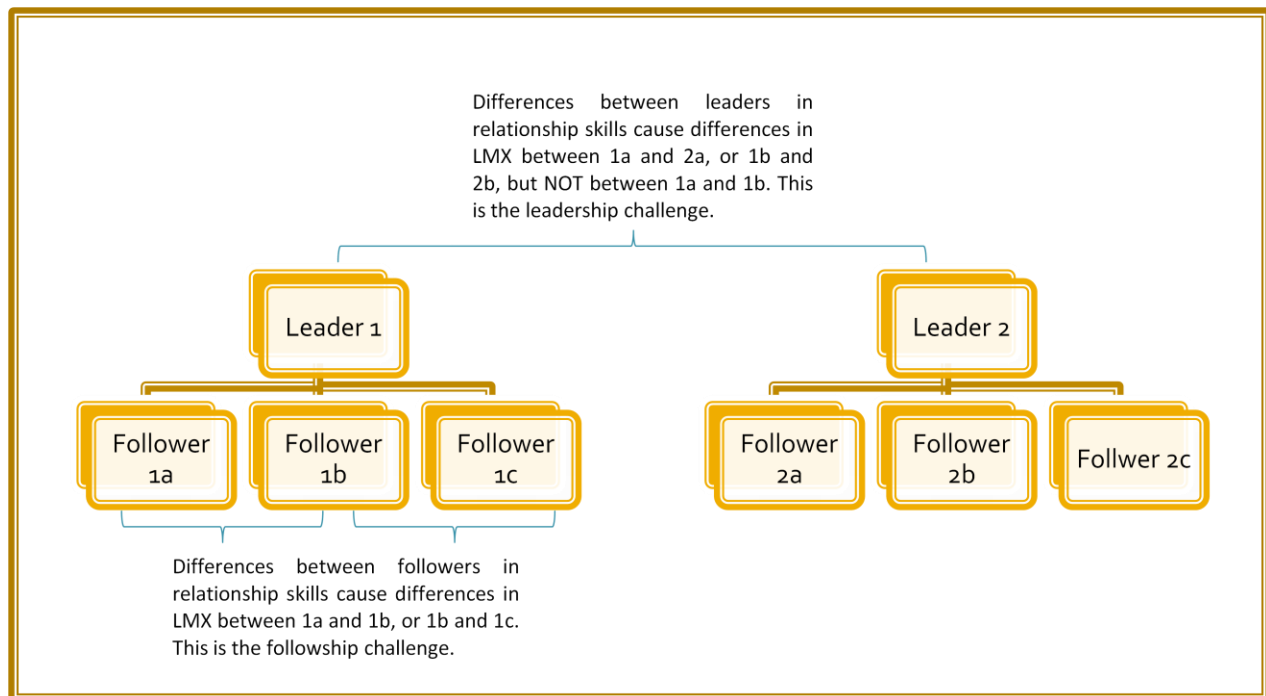[10] A sponsor is someone, or some group, who gives another person opportunities, promotions, etc.

[11] A dyad is a single person-to-person relationship.

[12] Contest-mobility is when people are evaluated for a new job based on set criteria that can be measured.

[13] Sponsored-mobility is when people are moved into a new job based on who they know.

between impression management and performance appraisals (Wayne & Liden, 1995). Thacker & Wayne (1995) note that building a strong relationship with a manager, "has a positive effect on an individual's evaluations," though not all influence tactics produce positive outcomes. Thompson (2006) adds that, "performance evaluations in administrative settings often rely more on supervisor perceptions than on quantifiable indices."

Leader-Member Exchange[14] (LMX) has been shown to impact performance appraisals (Kacmar, Witt, Zivnuska, & Gully, 2003; Harris, Kacmar, & Carlson, 2006; Gerstner & Day, 1997) though there is evidence of a U-shaped relationship between LMX and stress (Harris & Kacmar, 2006). When you compare two leaders (*interleader*), the difference in ability to build strong relationships with their followers produces differences in leadership performance. However, for any particular leader (*intraleader*), differences in relationships with employees are logically because of the employee. If we start with the assumption that leaders approach relationships consistently, then followers who positively influence the quality of the LMX create the strongest relationships. This distinction is illustrated in Figure 1.

Differences between leaders in relationship skills cause differences in LMX between 1a and 2a, or 1b and 2b, but NOT between 1a and 1b. This is the leadership challenge.

Leader 1

Leader 2

Follower 1a

Follower 1b

Follower 1c

Follower 2a

Follower 2b

Follwer 2c

Differences between followers in relationship skills cause differences in LMX between 1a and 1b, or 1b and 1c. This is the followship challenge.

Figure 1: Leadership affects overall mean differences in leader-follower relationship. This is a between-leader effect. Followship affects within leader differences in the leader-follower relationship.

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[14] LMX theory investigates the relationship between a leader and each of their followers. It is not as concerned with the team, or strategy formation, or other aspects of leadership.

MacKenzie et al. (1999) found that organizational citizenship behaviors[15] (OCBs) have a significant effect on performance appraisals. All three categories of OCBs have aspects that are readily amenable to interpretation as good followship behaviors[16]. The authors identify a number of interesting results. First, OCBs are at least as important to performance appraisal outcomes as objective performance measures. Second, there is a positive relationship between the importance of OCBs and the management level of the employee: OCBs become more important to performance appraisals as management responsibilities increase. This effect could be because of role-model responsibilities (Organ, 1988), task-context overlap, or the difficulty of developing and using quantitative measures at more senior levels (Borman & Motowildo, 1993). Fundamentally, followship is more recognized by senior staff (Dixon & Westbrook, 2003) and likely to be rewarded more strongly as a result (see Fig. 2). Third, there is a link between OCBs and managers' beliefs about the intrinsic or extrinsic[17] motivation of subordinates. It may be that these beliefs moderate or intermediate the effect of OCBs since they have an effect on performance appraisals (DeVoe & Iyengar, 2004). Finally, Ilies, Hanrgang, & Morgenson (2007) found a relationship between LMX and OCBs. From this review, it is clear that followship impacts individual career success and that it is more important the more senior the employee.

Anecdotally, workshops and interviews we have conducted with employees at various levels of seniority confirm this. It takes longer to explain followship to junior staff than senior

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[15] OCBs can be thought of as various behaviors by employees that improve the general climate within a company, but are not directly rewarded by the company. For example, an OCB might be working on the company's United Way Campaign as a volunteer. See next Footnote for more details on OCBs.

[16] The category "Civic virtue" contains followship items such as:
- Attends functions that are not required but that help the agency/company image
- Actively participates in agency/company meetings.

The category "Sportsmanship" contains followship items such as:
- Consumes a lot of time complaining about trivial matters
- Always focuses on what's wrong with his her situation rather than the positive side
- Tends to make "mountains out of molehills"

The category "Helping" contains followship items such as
- Encourages other managers in the office to do well in their jobs
- Is a stabilizing influence in the agency when dissension occurs
- Is willing to take time out of his or her busy schedule to help with recruiting or training new agents

I haven't attempted to explain in this paper why all of these are examples of good followship. If you are interested in discussing, contact me at marc@flipskills.com.

[17] Intrinsic motivation is doing a job because you enjoy it. Extrinsic motivation is doing a job because you get paid for it, or expect some other reward such as a trip.

staff. When asked to define the attributes of good followers, senior staff come up with a richer set of behavioral indicators, are less confined by followship stereotypes, can cite more cases of good followship, and appear to comprehend the nuances of followship more rapidly. Senior managers also appear to understand the importance of followship to personal success. Neither group, however, was sure of whether followship contributes to organizational success nor could they articulate followship as a broad concept prior to the workshops and interviews.
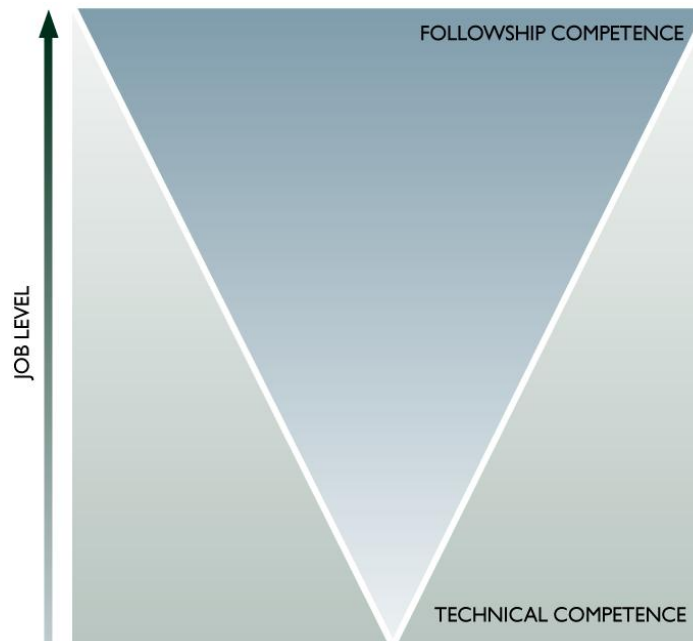
Figure 2: Technical competence is most important for career success and mobility in front-line or front-line supervisory roles. As you proceed up the organizational chart followship takes over in importance because more of the work that has to get done relies on alignment, strategy implementation, and working through others.

Overall, the available evidence points to a strong relationship between followship and personal career success. Articulating the relationship between followship and success can be important in the workplace for a variety of reasons:

1. Invisible promotion criteria lead to dissatisfaction and performance issues. As Beehr, Nair, Gudanowski, & Such (2004) note, "people consider promotions based on performance fair, whereas they consider non-performance criteria for promotions unfair." Followship is a performance criterion both personally and, as the next section will show, because it has an impact on organizational effectiveness.

2. Unless followship is properly articulated it is difficult to remediate or enhance. Making the invisible visible allows for a productive discussion of what constitutes good followship and of its implementation through practical steps to improve it including training, mentoring, and work design. I believe this has special relevance to *Gen Y* as their upbringing and education has been more focused on leadership to the exclusion of followship than any preceding generation.

3. Good followers derive greater satisfaction, remuneration, self-actualization, and other benefits from work than poor followers[18]. Promoting followship leads to a stronger workforce.

Clearly, more engaged, satisfied and productive employees add to the bottom line of the company. The next section discusses other evidence that followship is a serious part of organizational success.

The evidence that good followship has an organizational impact

Many articles have shown that leadership is related to organizational success as well as to the job satisfaction and motivation of subordinates (for a review see Kaiser et al., 2008). There is similar evidence that followship is important for organizational success. For example, a variety of personality factors have repeatedly been shown to be correlated with job performance (Hurz & Donovan, 2000; Barrick & Mount, 1991; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). In the case of OCBs, MacKenzie et al. (1999) speculate that managers value it because, "(OCBs) enhance a manager's (a) personal productivity, (b) efficiency of his or her unit, (c) ability to attract the best employees, and/or (d) ability to adapt to a changing environment." Larry Bossidy, former CEO of Allied Signal and Honeywell and COO of GE Capital, notes that followship is important as a signal of future potential. He says, "I'll favour someone who exhibits the behaviors I expect over someone who doesn't, even if the

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[18] Of course, the argument could be made that greater satisfaction, remuneration, and other benefits leads to better followship. While there is an argument for a reverse causal link, it only makes sense if you also take the position that followers have no ability to influence their situations.

latter's numbers are slightly better, because I know the former has the potential to contribute more to the organization over time."[19]

There is additional evidence linking follership to corporate success. Good followers develop social capital[20] to pursue initiatives not directly assigned by their managers and, in doing so, add organizational value (Thompson, 2006). Good followers can act as a counterbalance to poor leadership, make the organization more resilient to changes in leadership, contribute ideas above and beyond management direction, be additional eyes and ears focused on the external environment, deliver greater personal productivity, and mentor new staff. All members of an organization are followers (with the possible exception of a CEO/owner) while generally only 15-30% are formal leaders. *There are always more followers than leaders* so the total impact of follership on an organization can be substantial even if follership is less important than leadership on a per employee basis.

It is tempting to believe leaders create the environment that enables the successful performance of followers but such a perspective ignores the fact that people, regardless of role, actively create their own situations[21]. LMX theorists often emphasize the role of the leader in developing the relationship between leaders and followers (Ilies et al., 2007) while downplaying the fact that it is a relationship, i.e., two people both of whom contribute. Some leaders are good at creating high quality LMX relationships with all their staff but, within the span of any single leader, a variety of successful (or not) relationships exist. What causes this variability if not the characteristics of the follower? In other words, the follower has a crucial but overlooked role in creating effective relationships (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001). If we believe leaders can lead then surely followers can follow and both have relevance in creating effective partnerships. It is therefore extremely difficult to assess the relative impact of leaders over followers. What we do know is that good followers:

1. Deliver greater productivity;

2. Help other team members;

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[19] Bossidy (2007).
[20] Social capital refers to the interlocking favors and goodwill people create to help them get things done later.
[21] In other words, they have 'personal agency'.

3. Create additional leadership capacity.

4. Enhance the status of the organization within the community.

5. Solve more problems while creating fewer problems.

6. Adapt better to change.

7. Enhance leader productivity.

To summarize, if leaders create the plans and followers carry out the plans, then both are integral to a successful business. A balanced study of organizational behavior requires attention to both.

Good followship

Leadership is difficult to define and there is no consensus understanding of what a leader is or what leadership entails (a recent epistolary paper by Bedeian & Hunt, 2006, is a readable introduction to the different definitions of leadership, as well as to whether leading and managing mean the same). My personal definition of leadership is the process through which one person influences the purpose or direction of one or more other persons[22]. Followship, then, is reasonably defined as *accepting* or *enabling* the goal achievement of one's leader. In this way, the two behave as mutual and complementary roles: a leader can only lead if there are followers, and a follower can only follow if there is a leader. One cannot be defined without the other – it's a partnership.

Articulating the specific attributes of *good* followers can be done in a number of ways. The predominant approach is to create a typology of followship behaviors. Authors who have done this include Kelley, 1992; Chaleff, 1995; Kellerman, 2007; Zaleznik, 1965; Potter, Rosenbach, & Pittman, 1996; and Thody, 2000. The models created in this way generally rely on one dimension:

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[22] This is similar to a definition of leadership provided by Jaques & Clement (1991), "Leadership is that process in which one person *sets* the purpose or direction for one or more other persons, and gets them to move along together with him or her and with each other in that direction with competence and full commitment (p. 4)." (my italics) My challenge with this definition is that leadership can be exercised without setting someone else's goals (explicit leadership), as when we talk about thought leadership or even when someone behaves as a leader within a peer relationship (implicit leadership). That is the added richness I believe my definition brings.

- Kellerman – *engagement*;

- Chaleff – *courage*;

or two dimensions,

- Kelley – *active engagement* and *independent thinking*;

- Zaleznik – *dominance vs. submissiveness* and *activity vs. passivity*;

- Potter et al. – *relationship* and *performance initiative*;

and once an author has identified their key dimension(s), a typology of followers is generally produced next. One writer cut straight to the chase and simply defined followers by listing the types,

- Thody[23] – *communicator, alienated, aspirant, dependent, teacher, plateau'd, gate-keeper, Machiavellian, muse, recalcitrant, rescuer, sheep, resnatronic, survivor, second-in-command, yes-man, sidekick, toxic handler.*

None of the models above have been scientifically validated although Tanoff & Barlow (2002) does look at the alpha reliabilities[24] of Kelley's followship scale.

Followship isn't a new concept. In 1527, Baldassare Castiglione wrote at length about the attributes required of a great follower (courtier) in Renaissance Italy – *The First Book of the Courtier.* His book proved so popular that 108 editions were published over a ninety year period and it was considered essential reading throughout Europe for any cultured noble. While Castiglione's prescription for good followship may not be relevant today, and even in his day it was a highly idealized vision of courtly behavior, recent authors have attempted to modernize the concept by developing their own list of specific attributes of good followship (see Table 1, below).

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[23] Adapted from Kerry (2003).
[24] This is a measure of how well the questions are really asking about the same concept. The value of alpha for Kelley's measure is slightly lower than is considered good for a questionnaire. The other name for this concept is Cronbach's alpha.

Author	Attributes of a Good Follower		
Bossidy	• Gets involved • Generates ideas • Willing to collaborate	• Willing to lead initiatives • Develops leaders and themselves • Stays current	• Anticipates • Drives own growth • Is a player for all seasons
Thody	• Believes in the importance of being a good follower	• Looks beyond themselves • Values their own independence	• A balancing act – follows while offering up ideas, self-motivated and self-directed.
Meilinger	• Doesn't blame the boss; supports and does not undermine • Accepts responsibility • Tells the truth and doesn't quibble • Does homework; gives boss the info to make a decision; anticipates questions	• Fights in private and keeps it private • When making a recommendation, remembers will likely have to implement it so knows own weaknesses	• Makes a decision, then runs it past the boss • Keeps the boss informed • If they see a problem, fixes it • Puts in more than an honest day's work, but doesn't forget their family
Infantry magazine[25]	• Knows themselves and seeks self-improvement • Is technically and tactically proficient • Complies with orders and initiates appropriate actions in the absence of orders	• Develops a sense of responsibility and takes responsibility for own actions • Makes sound and timely decisions or recommendations	• Sets the example for others • Is familiar with their leader and his job, and anticipates his requirements • Keeps leader informed • Understands the task and ethically accomplishes it • Team member, not a yes man
Latour & Rest	• Displays loyalty • Considers integrity of paramount importance	• Functions well in change-oriented environments	• Functions well on teams • Thinks independently and critically

Table 1: This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but it does include the main authors who focus on specific attributes rather than overall dimensions of followship.

Finally, it is possible to characterize followship through implicit beliefs about what constitutes a good follower. Violations of these beliefs would affect the ability of a follower to build an effective relationship with their leader and would negatively impact individual and organizational results. Such implicit followship theories (IFTs) are precise analogues of implicit leadership theories (ILTs) already well studied in the leadership literature and which have been shown to correlate with LMX and employee outcomes (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). Interestingly, there is evidence that IFTs have a cultural component. Yukl et al. (2003) demonstrated differences in upward influence tactics between Western and Eastern business cultures although the results for Hong Kong suggest that the level of industrialization and globalization of business may override some country-level cultural constructs. Managers' perceptions of followers' extrinsic vs. intrinsic motivation are culturally-based constructs with a

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[25] Quoted in Townsend, 2002, as originally cited from the United States Army *Infantry* magazine.

direct effect on performance appraisals (DeVoe & Iyengar, 2004). The GLOBE study on leadership (House & GLOBE, 2004) identifies ILTs around the world with significant differences found in 10 geographical/cultural clusters. It is therefore probable that IFTs will also be made up of a mix of emic and etic[26] elements.

All the above characterizations of followship, whether by dimension or as a list of attributes, share a common flaw: the same traits might be equally valuable for a *Leader*, a *Team Member,* or a *Follower*. Tanoff & Barlow (2002) investigated whether leadership and followship were the same concept and noted significant positive correlations between the LPS leadership scale and Kelley's PFS followship scale. Similarly, Taylor & Rosenbach (2005, p. 84) say, "Qualities that make effective followers are paradoxically the same qualities found in effective leaders." Since many positive behaviors and personality traits are required regardless of the role, it is not a paradox that good followers tend to make good leaders. For example, being humble may be rated highly for leaders but it is unlikely to be unique to leaders when the followship and team membership components are fully considered[27]. Figure 3, below, illustrates this quandary: some skills are shared by all three categories while others are specific to one category or another. Good followers need to have the skills shared by the other roles, but there are also skills *specific* to followship. Determining which traits are unique to leadership, or followship, or team membership, is important for a useful model of followship.

The conditions under which a specific skill or trait is valuable in a role can also depend on context such as culture. Leadership is often couched in terms of influence and individualism which is preferentially related to efficacy in America (Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002). In Japan, by contrast, adjustment and group-relatedness are more important cultural norms – only by examining the full range of *differences between the roles* in each culture can we decide on a reasonable etic meaning of leadership, followship, or team.

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[26] Emic elements of culture refer to elements local to the region being studied. Etic elements of culture are global, or at least are universal across the groups being studied.

[27] In other words, we are making sure the effects we attribute to good leadership aren't just generally good effects. For example, it's really common to say that good leaders have to be smart. But, really, shouldn't any good employee be smart? It is hardly a characteristic that we would want to be unique to leaders. This is where the general theories of followship such as those proposed by Kellerman or Kelley or Chaleff aren't very strong. They tend to talk about overall characteristics that any good employee, regardless of role, should have such as courage, or engagement. Generally, the writers who have stuck to defining the attributes of a good follower (see Table 1) tend to be better because they refer specifically to the role of a follower.
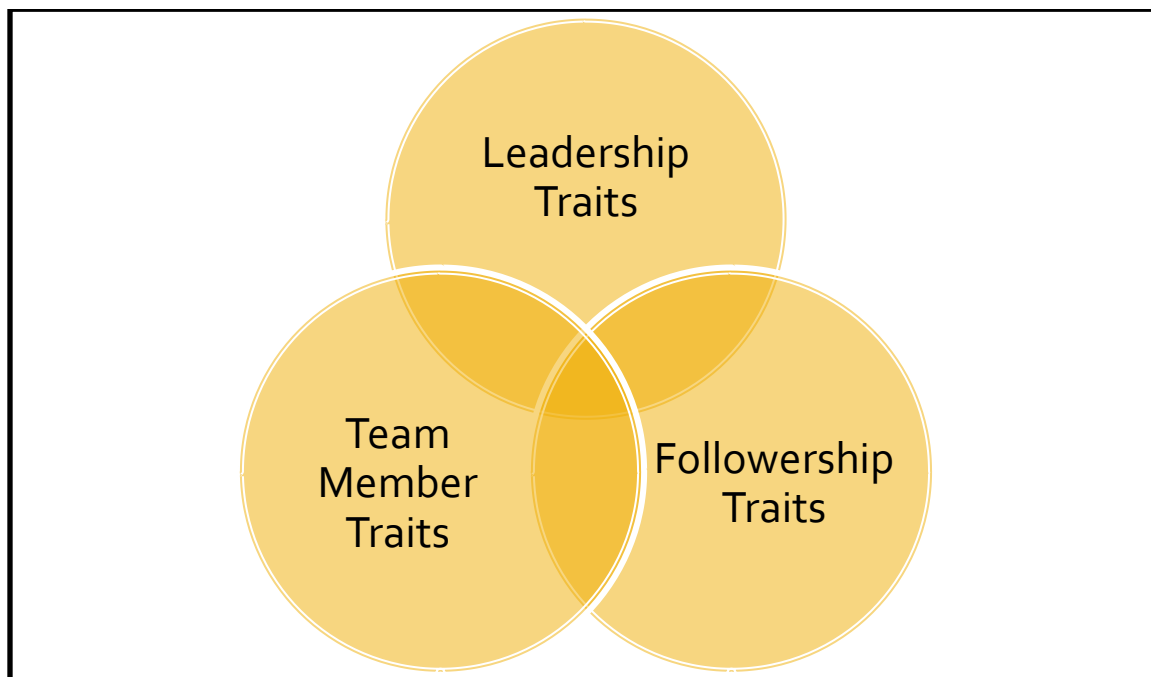
Figure 3: The three primary roles of employees. Each circle represents the attributes and traits considered useful for successful role fulfillment. Intersections of the circles would be traits and attributes that are considered equally valuable for both (or all three) roles. For example, intelligence might be a valued trait of all three; dominance a good trait only for leadership; and ability to follow orders shared between Team Member and Follower only. Unless a theory considers all three circles, it is not possible to claim that a specific trait linked to positive performance of one is not actually a shared trait good for the others. Virtually all of the current Leadership trait-models and theories suffer from this basic misapprehension.

The pattern emerging from both practitioners and academics confirms followship as a determinant of organizational success. It is still very early days and the models proposed to date have not taken into account either the research we have referenced or the concerns we have raised. A better model would resolve these challenges while introducing a richer paradigm for researchers to study.

A proposed new model of followship

In addition to a thorough literature review, over the past four years S. Kerr[28] and I have conducted research on followship using a number of techniques:

- Structured and unstructured interviews with mid-level and senior management

- Focus group methodology with participants from different industries, generations, and experience

- Observations conducted in the workplace

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[28] Samantha Kerr is President and Senior Partner of FLIPskills Consulting.

- Case studies and incidence reports

- Workshops and workshop feedback

- Expert panels

These investigations have led us to identify two core competencies specific to followship. Critically, neither of these competencies is related to team skills or leadership.

First Core Competency: *Personal Manageability™*

Personal Manageability™ is the skill with which the follower takes responsibility for being easy to manage. It is about actively working at establishing a strong relationship with the leader, their leader's peers, and their leader's boss. It includes coming to work with an attitude that positively affects the work environment; stretching their role to its outer limits; delivering on commitments; and knowing how to communicate upwards effectively. These skills work with any leader in any organization. Note that this competency does not mean that a follower does not require leadership simply that it enables the leader to lead more effectively.

Second Core Competency: *Leader Support™*

Leader Support™ is the skill with which a follower assists his/her leader's job by understanding, promoting, and being passionate about the same goals. It means championing the organization's culture; stretching their defined job past its outer limits; providing excellent decision support; and working hard to appreciate and align to the leader's style. For the most part, leader support skills are particular to the leader, the department, and the organization. Whenever one of these changes the follower must adapt to the new situation. The focus, then, is on learning what to look for and how to always be on the leader's wavelength.

Some people have more natural awareness of how to be a good follower than others just as some are naturally better at leadership. We conducted interviews with senior executives who were identified as good followers and they could readily provide examples of situations that demonstrated these two core competencies. Few of them, however, were able to identify their behaviors as followship – when the idea was introduced to them there was a universally positive reaction: a 'eureka' moment. The ability to aggregate behavior-specific actions into a

broader framework made the concept of followship more understandable, trainable, and generalize-able to new situations.

In working through a comprehensive model of followship, we identified ten subskills associated with the two core competencies. Within Personal Manageability™, there are six skills: communications, attitude, rapport, etiquette, accountabilities, and personal ROI. Within Leader Support™ there are four skills: goals, decisions, culture, and style. Table 2, below, gives a very brief outline of what each skill refers to. In defining the skills, care was taken to make them specific to followship and independent of leadership or team membership. To ensure this distinction is concrete, a superscript 'F' has been added to each skill.

Skill	Definition
Communication[F]	If the leader loves lists and the follower writes paragraphs, it is a recipe for bad communications. If the leader likes drive-by meetings, good followers deliver take-out. Being a great communicator in the followship context means: • Inform without inundating • No surprises • Summarizing ruthlessly • Learning the communication preferences of a specific leader • Self-exposing the thinking behind actions and decisions
Attitude[F]	Attitude is the most obvious outward sign of engagement. It encompasses: • Staying in character – being predictable to the leader • Not taking business personally; learning to back-off when too personally invested • Not sweating the small stuff that isn't core to the business or the job • Staying positive about peers • Believing in the leader • Being self-motivated
Rapport[F]	Building a relationship requires as much effort by a follower as by a leader. Strong, consistent dispositional behaviors (what a person does when it isn't required is considered dispositional) facilitates rapport.
Etiquette[F]	In her book, *Don't Take the Last Donut,* Judith Bowman defines business etiquette as a set of signals that show respect, inspire confidence, and earn trust. Followship etiquette is the same applied to one specific situation. It is an array of common courtesies that are far from common in impact. Appropriate etiquette demonstrates respect for the boss and respect for the organization. For example, in everyday conversation it isn't important who gets the last word. Good followers, however, ensure the leader gets the last word.
Accountability[F]	Followship accountability has a number of facets: • Stretching the job to its 'outer limits'. • Thinking of the job as a going concern. Ensure ease of job continuity and personal succession planning. • Getting the right job done and the job done right. Critically assessing information to ensure the purpose and job objectives are clear • Actively learning new technologies

Skill	Definition
Personal ROI[F]	Companies and organizations, including non-profits or the military, are in business to make more money or exceed the previous year's targets, and they generally want to *measure the results*.
	Good followers do the same. Every year they up their personal objectives. If the corporate goal is a 10% Return On Investment (ROI), the follower does too. This could include streamlining everyday tasks and processes (10% increased efficiency), renegotiating a supplier contract (10% cost savings), or bringing more volunteers into the team (non-profit). Then, a good follower tracks the result and report back to the leader in a timely, useful way.
Goals[F]	Accountability was about stretching to the outer limits of the job. Goals are about supporting the leader's job in ways that aren't directly the follower's job. When a follower helps solve the leader's problems or takes on tasks that are low value to the leader (or sap his/her energy), it increases the capacity of the organization, supports the team's work, and enhances productivity.
	Goals are all about thinking outside the box... and thinking inside the leader's box.
Decisions[F]	There are two kinds of decisions:
	1. Ones the leader makes (or the leader is required to follow);
	2. Those the follower makes.
	Distinguishing the two is important. Good followers make the decisions within their purview, and provide decision support to the leader when s/he is making one. Once a decision is made, the follower's job is to implement it in a way that makes it the best decision possible.
Culture[F]	It is important to honor the organizational culture and distinguish oneself in culturally appropriate ways. As Robert Greene says in his book, *48 Laws of Power*, "Think as you like, but behave like others."
Style	While a single leader has many followers to adjust to, each follower only has one leader and so it is largely the follower's responsibility to figure out what works best. The elements of style include everything from the obvious (appropriate dress) to the best times of the day for meetings. There are established assessment tools such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator™, Kirton Adaptor Innovator Inventory™ on creative preferences, or FourSight™ that can give insight into leader style preferences. Tracking and adapting to these preferences is a key skill for any good follower.

Table 2: Brief definition of the subskills that make up the two core competencies of good followship. The complete followship model includes a few other core operating guidelines which have been left out for the purposes of exposition, but these subskills encompass most of the work done by previous authors.

This framework incorporates many of the attributes listed by previous authors (see Table 1) but it is quite different from the typologies (dimensions) posited by earlier authors. This model has been tested in the workplace – with employees and leaders – and the results have proven effective. Empirical work to validate the model still needs to be done but the idea are consistent with current research into OCBs, upwards impression management, LMX, performance appraisals, and other existing constructs. While I expect the general two-competency framework to be a solid model, it is possible that the skills within each will prove

more effective in certain situations than others, and that some will have a greater direct impact on personal and organizational outcomes.

Conclusion

The research and theory on followship is still very preliminary. Although a number of organizations have adopted followship as a core competency very few people are currently engaged in the serious research needed to develop it further. By way of contrast, the largest single study of leadership, House & GLOBE (2004), has already consumed thousands of hours of work, consists of mountains of data, and the basic results and analysis are contained in three massive books. My hope is that one day followship will receive this same level of attention. It is time to put to rest the *Great Man Theory*, it is time to leave off the *Romance of the Leader,* and realize that organizations are made up of leaders, team members, AND followers, all of whom together form a valuable partnership.

To recap, the goals of this white paper were fourfold:

1. Provide a quick review of the extant literature. In the reference section at the end of the paper I included all the articles and books mentioned to this point as well as some pertinent other pieces that did not logically fit into the flow of the paper.

2. Define followship.

3. Motivate the further study of followship by discussing its relevance to organizational effectiveness and personal career success.

4. Introduce a new model of followship incorporating the latest available research, along with some additional work done here at FLIPskills™.

I hope that you found the white paper interesting and that it inspires you to add to the discussion about followship in the future. Do contact me at marc@flipskills.com with your comments, thoughts, additional references, corrections, or proposals.

For more details on the followship model, or to enquire about the services offered at FLIPskills™, e-mail me at marc@flipskills.com or go to www.flipskills.com. Some of the services offered by FLIPskills™ include: followship training for your organization; keynotes;

organizational development including competency models, performance appraisals, and employee surveys; executive coaching; and train-the-trainer programs for independent consultants or in-house trainers.

About the author

Marc Hurwitz CEBS BS MMath MS (physics) MBA PhD (in progress; neuroscience)

Marc has an extensive background as an entrepreneur, trainer, HR consultant, award winning communicator, university instructor, and senior marketing executive. He combines a broad education with a warm, inclusive, yet energetic facilitation style and a healthy dollop of creativity.

After 20+ years in business, Marc returned to school in 2006 to work on a PhD in behavioral neuroscience. When he is not writing and thinking about followship or neuroscience, Marc does performance poetry, leads poetry workshops, acts in musical theatre, facilitates for Think^X ™ (www.thinkxic.com), participates in creativity conferences, and produces shows in his home town of Kitchener-Waterloo.

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Appendix A: Propositions on Followship

Note: The following list is directly from Heller & Van Til, 1982.

Proposition 1. Leadership and followership are linked concepts, neither of which can be comprehended without understanding the other.

Proposition 2. The study of the follower, in particular, has been largely neglected.

Proposition 3. Leadership and followership are best seen as roles in relationship.

Proposition 4. The leader must lead, and do it well to retain leadership; the follower must follow, and do it well to retain followership.

Proposition 5. Good leadership enhances followers, just as good followership enhances leaders.

Proposition 6. In many cases, the follower is a potential leader who chooses not to become active in a given situation.

Proposition 7. Where all seek to lead, or all seek to follow, there can be no leadership or followership.

Proposition 8. Students of leadership tend to maintain an advocacy of participative, democratic leadership styles and more flexible and egalitarian leader-follower roles.

Proposition 9. Leveling or equalizing the leader-follower relationship does not eliminate the need for role differentiation.

Proposition 10. Leaders and followers may become so independent of each other than the synergy of the relationship is lost.

Proposition 11. By shortening or removing the distance between leader and follower, the leader may lose much-needed protection.

Proposition 12. In the successful cases, the behavior of both leaders and followers changes for the better.

Proposition 13. Deviations from the hierarchical leader-follower model are still unusual.

Proposition 14. The successful cases involved some outside intervention aimed at organizational development.

Proposition 15. Leadership and followership may be arts in which people can become more highly skilled.

Proposition 16. A rapidly changing environment places changing demands on leaders and followers alike.

Proposition 17. In a society of reduced resources, the leader acts less often as a facilitator of program and more frequently as the adversary of followers—the one who fires them.

Proposition 18. In a transformational crises, leadership and followership become profoundly disoriented.